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Lugar defends Habib record on Managua

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The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday defended presidential envoy Philip Habib, who has come under fire from House Republicans.

Some GOP members fear that Mr. Habib, President Reagan's special envoy to Central America, is willing to support a Nicaraguan peace treaty that would end U.S. aid to resistance forces but contain no provisions to ensure democracy in the war-torn nation.

"Phil Habib is not talking about a piece of paper people can sign and forget about," Sen. Richard P. Lugar, Indiana Republican, said yesterday. "If a treaty is signed by the Central American countries that has all the elements we feel should be in there, we should support it."

"Otherwise, negotiating is a sham," Mr. Lugar said in a brief interview. "Phil Habib has done a great service for the people of this country."

House Republican leaders, angered by Mr. Habib's recent statements that appear to signal a softening of the administration's resolve to back the resistance, wrote to Mr. Reagan earlier this week asking him to clarify publicly administration support for the insurgents — regardless of the outcome of Central-American peace talks scheduled for June 4-6.

The leaders said that, based on Mr. Habib's statements, they are concerned that the administration might cut off aid to the resistance forces if Nicaraguan President Daniel

Ortega signs a so-called Contadora peace agreement, without making sure that Mr. Ortega's Marxist regime actually carries out the agreement.

[From his base camp in Nicaragua, rebel leader Eden Pastora, known as "Commander Zero" from

his days fighting with the Sandinistas, said last night that he would seek asylum in Costa Rica for himself and 400 men.

[A Pastora spokesman said Mr. Pastora, whose fight against Nicaragua's Marxist government has sputtered for three years, would make the request tomorrow on the Costa Rican side of the San Juan River that is the border with Nicaragua. He accused the CIA of splitting the opposition to the Sandinistas.]

[On Saturday, six other military leaders of the southern front announced they had broken from Mr. Pastora and joined another guerrilla group, the United Nicaraguan Opposition, to obtain U.S. aid.]

["Commander Zero," 49, was a hero of the Sandinista revolution that in 1979 ended more than four decades of rule in Nicaragua by the Somoza family. He left Nicaragua in 1981 and denounced the government for its Marxist coloration. He returned to southern Nicaragua in 1983 to fight the Sandinistas.]

In Washington, White House chief of staff Donald Regan yesterday assured GOP House members that the administration has no intention of backing down from its promise to support the resistance forces. During a morning meeting on Capitol Hill, Mr. Regan told lawmakers that

the president will continue to press for approval of his \$100 million aid request.

"Everybody is relaxed today because we are assured that [the administration] won't sign some weak treaty," said Rep. Robert Dornan, California Republican. "Now we're aware that the White House and the Republican leadership is on the same track."

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said the United States is not going to "buy a pig in a poke."

"We would have to be satisfied as to the political process," Mr. Speakes said. "We can't address now what

would happen if Ortega signs, not knowing what the circumstances would be. If he signs, it won't change the administration's commitment for assistance to the opposition."

But Mr. Speakes acknowledged that an Ortega signature just before the June 12 House vote on the president's \$100 million rebel aid request could diminish chances of congressional approval.

"On this issue, it doesn't take a whole lot" to sway wavering lawmakers, the spokesman said.

Mr. Speakes said the president remains committed to seeking "a political solution to the problems of Central America, a comprehensive, simultaneous and verifiable agreement that would bring internal reconciliation in Nicaragua."

Specifically, Mr. Speakes said the

president would not support a treaty unless Nicaragua guaranteed free elections, internal reconciliation, a reduction of armed forces and ending military ties with the Soviet Union and Cuba.

Mr. Lugar, who recently returned from a Central American trip where Latin leaders are entering the upcoming peace talks with a list of requisites that must be included in the Contadora pact.

The Indiana Republican said leaders of the Latin American nations are calling for a cease-fire and reduced military presence in Nicaragua that is "comprehensive, simultaneous and verifiable."

"I see new assertiveness from these countries," Mr. Lugar said. "They want a treaty that is mindful, not one you can walk away from."